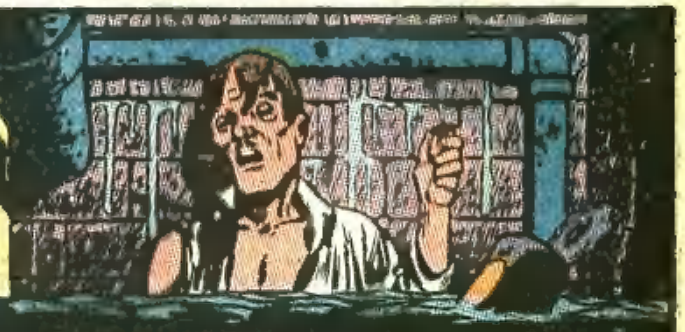
CRIME
NO. 5
10¢
CRIME SUSPENSTORIES
COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE!
AN ILLUSTRATED TERROR-TALE FROM THE HAUNT OF FEAR!

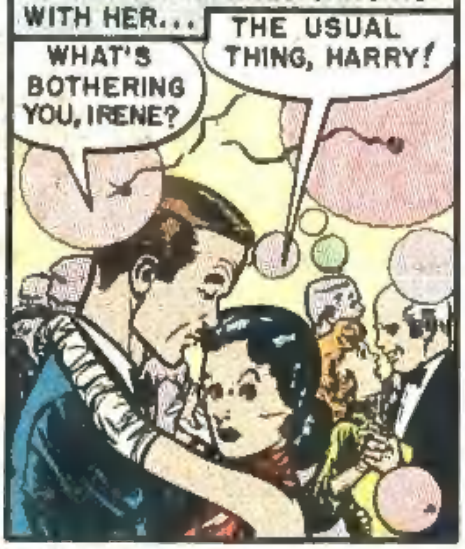
THE SEWER!

AH! THERE WAS HEADROOM HERE... ROOM FOR HIM TO STAND UPRIGHT, TO REST! HE SLUMPED AGAINST THE SLIME-COVERED WALL, CLOSED HIS EYES AND GULPED GREAT MASSES OF AIR. A SMILE FLICKED ACROSS HIS FACE, FOR HE KNEW THINGS WOULD BE ALL RIGHT NOW! ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS WAIT FOR THE WATER TO SUBSIDE AND THEN HE COULD ESCAPE!



NOW WAS THE TIME TO THINK, TO PLAN HIS NEXT MOVE... AND TO DO THAT HE HAD TO REACH BACK THROUGH HIS JUMBLED THOUGHTS TO THE BEGINNING OF THE WHOLE COCKEYED EPISODE...

IT BEGAN AT A PARTY GIVEN BY JOHN AND IRENE GOLDEN. HE WELL REMEMBERED DANCING WITH HER...



THE "USUAL THING" HAD BEEN HER HUSBAND, MATINEE IDOL JOHN GOLDEN, SURROUNDED BY LOVELY YOUNG FEMALES...

HARRY HAD HEARD HER TALK LIKE THAT OFTEN! BUT THAT NIGHT THERE WAS SOMETHING IN HER VOICE THAT WAS NEVER THERE BEFORE, AND IT PLEASED HIM GREATLY... FOR HARRY WAS DESPERATELY IN LOVE WITH IRENE GOLDEN!

WE COULD BE VERY HAPPY TOGETHER, IRENE! I *KNOW* WE COULD... IF ONLY JOHN WERE OUT OF THE WAY!

A *DIVORCE!* MAYBE JOHN WILL GIVE ME A DIVORCE!

NO! AS LONG AS HE'S MARRIED TO YOU, HE DOESN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT MARRYING HIS *OTHER* WOMEN! BUT THERE *IS* A WAY...

HOW, HARRY? I'VE GROWN TO HATE HIM SO MUCH... I... I'LL DO *ANYTHING!*

HE HAD OUTLINED HIS PLAN TO HER. A FEW MORE DRINKS... THE RIGHT WORDS... AND EVERYTHING WAS SET!

(HIC) *E'RRYONE'S GONE HOME!* (HIC) *HI, GEORGE!* OH, PARM ME... YOU... YOU'RE *HARRY!*

COME ON UPSTAIRS, JOHN... GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU!

YOU'RE A PAL, GEORGE! (HIC) *...REAL PAL! GOT BUMPIN'* (HIC) *FOR ME, GEORGE? WHASSHA GOT FOR ME, GEORGE?* OH, PARM ME... YOU... YOU'RE *HARRY!*

IN HERE, JOHN!

...INNA *BA'ROOM? WHASSHA GOT F'ME* (HIC) *INNA BA'ROOM, GEORGE?* OH, PARM ME... YOU... YOU'RE NOT GEORGE! YOU'RE...

JOHN'S BODY HAD SLAMMED AGAINST THE WALL AND CRUMPLED WITH A SPLASH INTO THE TUB FILLED WITH WATER. HE HAD LAIN VERY STILL AND HARRY AND IRENE HAD SILENTLY WATCHED AND LISTENED TO THE BUBBLES GURGLING OUT JOHN'S LAST BREATHS!

HE'S DEAD! THAT'S THE LAST TIME HE'LL *EVER* STAND BETWEEN US!

HE REMEMBERED HOW THEY HAD STUFFED THE DOPPING WET CORPSE INTO THE TRUNK OF HARRY'S CAR, AND THE QUEER EXPRESSION ON IRENE'S CHALK-WHITE FACE...

WHAT... WHAT WILL WE DO WITH HIM?

I...I DON'T KNOW! THROW HIM DOWN A SEWER, I GUESS! YEAH, *THAT'S* IT! *A SEWER!*

THEY HAD FOUND A SEWER IN A DESERTED SECTION, AND HARRY HAD PRIED IT OPEN... IT WAS THEN THAT THE RAIN HAD BEGUN...

HURRY UP... DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN!

DON'T... DON'T HURT HIM...

HURT HIM? ...CAN'T HURT HIM *NOW!* HE'S *DEAD!*

DEAD?

DEAD?!

GOOD GOD, HE'S DEAD! WE'VE MURDERED HIM! WHAT HAVE WE DONE?!

WHA..?

YOU LITTLE IDIOT! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?

WE'VE KILLED HIM! I MUST HAVE BEEN INSANE TO LET YOU TALK ME INTO THIS! GOD, FORGIVE ME! WE'VE MURDERED HIM! MURDERED HIM!

COME BACK HERE!

LEAVE ME ALONE! I HATE YOU! I MUST HAVE BEEN CRAZY TO THINK I COULD LOVE A MURDERER! YOU MURDERED MY HUSBAND!

CAN'T FOLLOW HER! HAVE TO GET RID OF THE BODY! SHE'LL BE ALL RIGHT...PROBABLY GO HOME! I'LL MEET HER THERE... SOON AS I FINISH WITH JOHN!
BUT SHE HADN'T RETURNED HOME! HE DIDN'T KNOW *WHERE* SHE HAD GONE... AND FEARING FOR HIS SAFETY, HE HAD DRIVEN THE STREETS TILL DAWN. HE BOUGHT A NEWSPAPER...
AH! HERE IT IS! *GOOD LORD!* SHE WENT TO THE *POLICE!* BUT SHE HASN'T TALKED! THEY THINK SHE'S INSANE... UNDER OBSERVATION...
HE HAD READ THE DETAILS! SHE HAD SUFFERED A GREAT SHOCK... HAD GONE TO THE POLICE BABBLING LIKE A LUNATIC ABOUT *MURDER!*
WAIT! THEY'RE HOPING THAT SHE'LL COME TO HER SENSES...THAT THE SHOCK WILL *WEAR OFF!* HMM... IF SHE TALKS...BUT *MAYBE* I CAN KEEP HER QUIET! THEY DON'T KNOW JOHN'S DEAD...
A PLAN HAD FORMED ITSELF IN HIS MIND. HE HAD GONE HOME... SHAVED, CHANGED HIS CLOTHES. IT WOULD BE RISKY...
...ONLY THING TO DO! IF I CAN GET ALONE WITH HER, I'LL SHUT HER UP FOR GOOD!
HARRY HAD GONE TO THE POLICE. THEY HAD QUESTIONED HIM FOR HOURS BUT FINALLY IT WAS OVER! HE HAD MADE HIS BID THEN...
...BUT CAN'T I SEE HER JUST FOR A *MOMENT?*
SORRY. SHE'S VIOLENT, YOU KNOW...UNDER TWENTY-FOUR HOUR GUARD! NO VISITORS!
PLEASE! I *MUST* SEE HER! I'M...I'M *WORRIED* ABOUT HER! I'LL ONLY BE A MINUTE...
SORRY. WE'LL TAKE GOOD CARE OF HER! YOU GO HOME... WE'LL LET YOU KNOW IF ANYTHING DEVELOPS!
EXIT

IT HADN'T WORKED! AND AFTER DRIVING THROUGH THE TORRENTS OF RAIN FOR MANY HOURS, HE HAD RETURNED HOME ...

YOU HARRY MARKS? WE WANT TO TALK TO YOU!

DETECTIVES!

HEY! COME BACK HERE!

THEN THE CHASE HAD BEGUN! UP ONE STREET... DOWN ANOTHER! THROUGH ALLEYS AND OVER BACK FENCES! BUT THEY WERE EVERYWHERE...

SHE TALKED! THE @W!! XXMG! FOOL TALKED! COPS ARE ALL OVER!

THEY'RE AFTER ME, ALL RIGHT! THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD'S FULL OF THEM! THEY'RE EVERYWHERE, LOOKING FOR ME! IRENE MUST HAVE TOLD THEM EVERYTHING! LAST TIME I'LL EVER TRUST A WOMAN!

@W!!xx! RAIN! STREETS ARE FLOODED! RIVER MUST HAVE OVERFLOWED ITS BANKS! HEY! THEY'RE COMING THIS WAY! I'LL CUT THROUGH THIS ALLEY!

WHA...? IT'S A DEAD END! WHAT'LL I DO?... CAN'T GO BACK... THEY'LL SPOT ME SURE! WAIT! THIS SEWER!

...SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THIS BEFORE! LET THEM LOOK FOR ME UP THERE! I'LL SLIP RIGHT BY THEM ...BY MOVING UNDERNEATH THEM!

THE WATER HADN'T BEEN DEEP AT FIRST, BUT AS HE PLODDED THROUGH THE STENCH-RIDDEN SEWER, THE WATER FROM THE STREETS ABOVE GRADUALLY BEGAN TO FILL THE TUNNEL...

...CAN'T STAND UP! NOT ENOUGH ROOM! (GASP)...KEEP MATCHES DRY! WATER'S UP TO MY CHEST!

HE HAD ALMOST BECOME PANICKY, AND HAD SHED HIS COAT AND JACKET BECAUSE THEY HAD HELD HIM BACK! THE WATER HAD RISEN HIGHER...UP TO HIS NECK...

TOO LATE TO TURN BACK! (GASP!) NEVER MAKE IT...WATER'S TOO HIGH... RISING TOO FAST!

THEN HE HAD REACHED THE PLACE WHERE HE NOW STOOD! THERE WAS ROOM TO STAND...AND TO BREATHE! HE SIMPLY HAD TO WAIT FOR THE WATER TO LOWER...AND HE COULD BE SAFE!

(GASP!) CAN'T GO ANY FURTHER! WATER'S RUSHING OUT THROUGH THAT SMALL PIPE! (GASP!) BETTER KEEP AWAY FROM IT...TERRIFIC SUCTION! (GASP!)

AND HE HAD RESTED! NOW HE OPENED HIS EYES, AND SAW WITH RELIEF THAT THE WATER WAS NO HIGHER! HE CHUCKLED. HE'D GET OUT OF THIS YET! SUDDENLY...

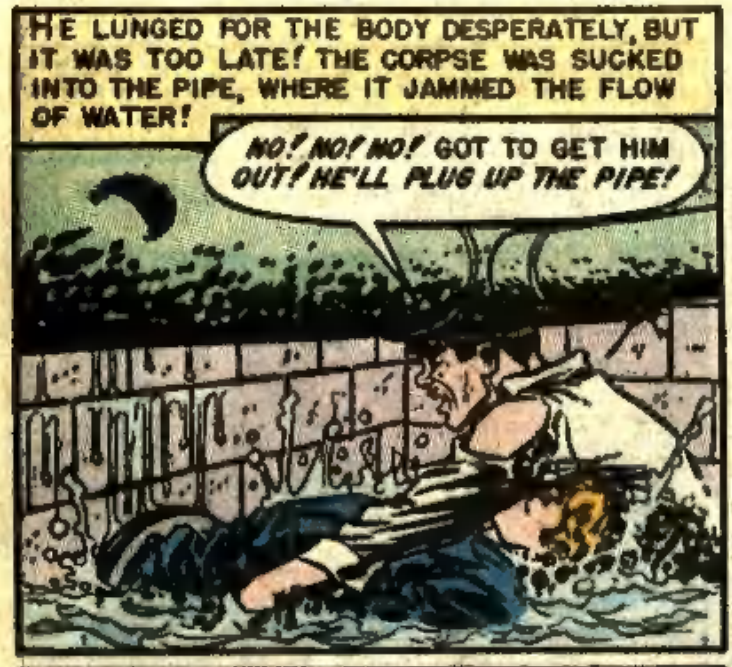
WHAT THE..? SOMETHING...SOMETHING IN THE WATER *BUMPED* AGAINST ME! I'LL STRIKE A MATCH...

HIS NUMBED FINGERS FUMBLED CLUMSILY! HE STRUCK THE MATCH THREE TIMES BEFORE IT FLARED...ITS LIGHT REVEALING HIS DISCOVERY...

JOHN!

HARRY BACKED FRANTICALLY AWAY FROM THE FLOATING, BLOATED CORPSE! THEN, REALIZATION AND FEAR STRUCK HIM...

HE'S BEING DRAWN INTO THE SMALL PIPE! *HE'LL BLOCK THE WATER'S ONLY OUTLET!*


HE LUNGED FOR THE BODY DESPERATELY, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE! THE CORPSE WAS SUCKED INTO THE PIPE, WHERE IT JAMMED THE FLOW OF WATER!
NO! NO! NO! GOT TO GET HIM OUT! HE'LL PLUG UP THE PIPE!

JOHN! F' GOD'S SAKE! COME OUT! COME OUT, I'LL DROWN!

HIS HYSTERICAL EFFORTS TO SAVE HIMSELF WERE IN VAIN! THE WATER ROSE HIGHER... TO THE CEILING...

ABOVE, IN THE STREETS, THE RAIN HAD STOPPED...
I'D SURE LIKE TO KNOW WHY THAT HARRY MARKS FELLOW RAN AWAY FROM US, SARGE!
DUNNO... HMP!... MAYBE HE THOUGHT WE WERE CROOKS!

BUT WE ONLY WANTED TO WARN HIM THAT IRENE GOLDEN HAD ESCAPED FROM THE PSYCHO WARD, AND HAD THREATENED TO KILL HIM!
IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW. WE CAUGHT HER BEFORE SHE COULD GET HIM!

I GUESS THEY'LL PUT HER AWAY FOR GOOD, HUH, SARGE?
GUESS SO! AT ANY RATE, IT'LL BE THE LAST TIME SHE'LL EVER CAUSE HARRY MARKS ANY TROUBLE!
-THE END-

ARCHIE'S WIFE NAGGED AND NAGGED AND NAGGED! SHE WAS QUITE A BALL-AND-CHAIN! IN FACT, ARCHIE *NEVER* WOULD HAVE BEEN FREE OF HER IF HE HADN'T MET...

MR. BIDDY...KILLER!

HI! THE NAME'S SIDNEY BRACKMAN! SOUND FAMILIAR? IT OUGHT TO! I'M THE ASSISTANT D.A.! REMEMBER THE CHESTER TRIAL? THE GUY WHO MURDERED HIS WIFE? I WAS THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY! I GOT A CONVICTION, TOO! ARCHIE CHESTER WAS SUPPOSED TO DIE TONIGHT FOR THE MURDER OF HIS WIFE!

I THOUGHT PERHAPS YOU'D HAVE A STATEMENT TO MAKE, ARCHIE!

I *TOLD* YOU EVERYTHING AT THE TRIAL! I TOLD YOU I DIDN'T *DO* IT!

MR. BIDDY! HE DID IT! *HE* MURDERED MY WIFE! WHY DON'T YOU FIND *HIM*?

WE'VE HAD A GENERAL ALARM OUT FOR HIM, ARCHIE! CAN'T FIND A TRACE..

WHY DON'T YOU *TELL* ME ABOUT THIS *MR. BIDDY*? YOU'VE SPOKEN ABOUT HIM SO *OFTEN!* WHEN DID YOU FIRST *MEET* HIM?

WHY, IT WAS IN THE PARK, I THINK! YES.. THAT'S RIGHT..

'I WAS HAVING DINNER WITH MY WIFE, EMILY, THAT NIGHT! I HAD JUST ANNOUNCED THAT I WAS GOING DOWN TO JOE'S PLACE FOR A LITTLE GAME OF PINOCHLE...'

WHAT? ARCHIE CHESTER! YOU'RE *NOT LEAVING THIS HOUSE!* I WORK AND SLAVE FOR YOU ALL DAY LONG... AND WHEN YOU COME HOME, YOU RUN RIGHT OUT AGAIN!

BUT, EMILY! THE BOYS ARE WAITING!

LET 'EM WAIT! YOU'RE NOT GOING *ANYWHERE!* YOU JUST WANT TO LEAVE THE HOUSE TO GET AWAY FROM *ME!*

NO, EMILY! THAT'S NOT TRUE! ONLY...I PROMISED THE BOYS..

ARCHIE CHESTER! IF YOU LEAVE THIS HOUSE, YOU'RE NOT COMING BACK, DO YOU HEAR! NEVER.. *NEVER...*

I'LL BE SEEING YOU, EMILY!

'I LEFT! I FIGURED SHE'D COOL OFF BY THE TIME I GOT BACK! SHE ALWAYS DID! I STARTED THROUGH THE PARK! I WAS LATE AND IT WAS A SHORT CUT! HE WAS SITTING ON A BENCH UNDER A LAMP-POST! HE CALLED TO ME..'

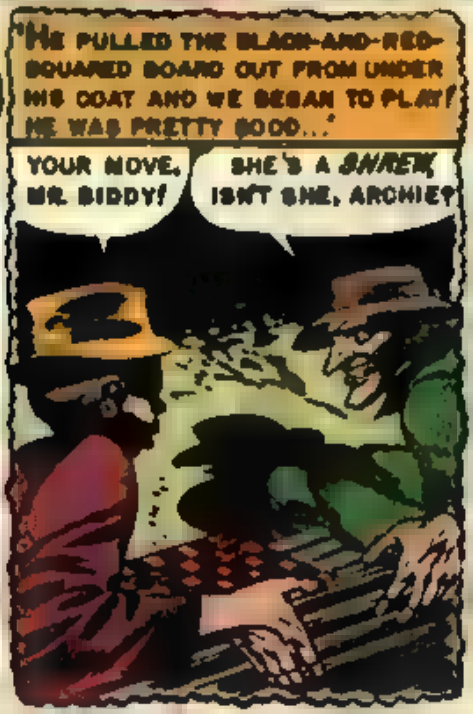
HEY! ARCHIE! C'MERE!

HUH? D'YOU CALL *ME?*

YEAH! I CALLED YOU! SIT DOWN! WE'LL HAVE A CHAT!
I..I DON'T KNOW YOU!

MR. BIDDY! JUST CALL ME MR. BIDDY! I'LL CALL YOU ARCHIE!
YOU...YOU KNOW MY NAME?

OF COURSE! I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU! CARE FOR A GAME OF CHECKERS?
CHECKERS! YOU KNOW I LIKE CHECKERS, TOO?


"HE PULLED THE BLACK-AND-RED-SQUARED BOARD OUT FROM UNDER HIS COAT AND WE BEGAN TO PLAY! HE WAS PRETTY GOOD..."
YOUR MOVE, MR. BIDDY!
SHE'S A SHREW, ISN'T SHE, ARCHIE?

WHO?
YOUR WIFE! YOU HATE HER, DON'T YOU? SHE'S ALWAYS NAGGING...NAGGING! I'LL BET SOMETIMES YOU WISH SHE WERE DEAD!

NO! NO! DON'T SAY THINGS LIKE THAT! I NEVER WISHED ANY SUCH THING!
HO, HO! COME, COME, ARCHIE! YOU CAN BE HONEST WITH ME! I KNOW YOU...VERY WELL!

IT...IT'S YOUR MOVE, MR. BIDDY!
DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT! ADMIT IT! YOU DO WISH SHE WERE DEAD, DON'T YOU?

ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! I DO! I DO! I DO WISH SHE WERE DEAD!
SH-H-H-H! NOT SO LOUD!

A YOUNG COUPLE PASSING OUR BENCH STARED AT ME! I HOPED THEY HADN'T HEARD! THEY SHOOK THEIR HEADS AND WALKED ON! MR. BIDDY CONTINUED...
SHE CAN BE...IF YOU REALLY WANT HER DEAD!
SHE... WHAT?

YOU HEARD ME, ARCHIE! IF YOU REALLY WANT HER DEAD, I'LL FIX IT!
FIX IT? HOW?

WHY, SIMPLE! I'LL KILL HER FOR YOU! THEN YOU'LL BE FREE...FREE...
I...I HAVE TO GO, MR. BIDDY! TH-THANKS FOR THE GAME!

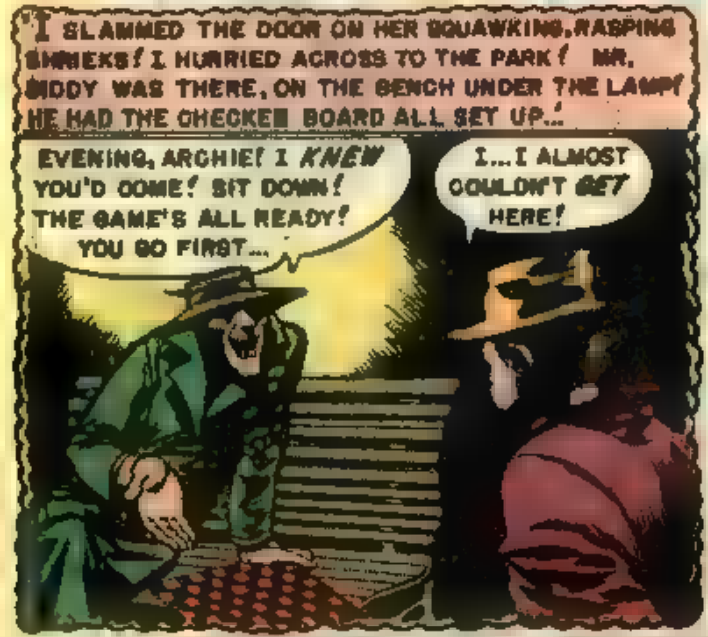
GOOD-BYE, ARCHIE! IF...IF YOU'D LIKE ANOTHER GAME... JUST COME BY AGAIN TOMORROW NIGHT!
YES...YES...WELL... THANKS AGAIN! GOOD... GOOD-BYE!

I WENT HOME! SHE WAS THERE, WAITING FOR ME! IT WAS AWFUL! SHE SCREAMED AND SCREAMED UNTIL I THOUGHT MY HEAD WOULD BURST...
...WALKING OUT ON ME, WHEN I TOLD YOU YOU COULDN'T! THE NERVE! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? THE NEXT TIME I SAY A THING...
YES, EMILY...

I COULDN'T SLEEP THAT NIGHT! I KEPT THINKING ABOUT MR. BIDDY... AND HIS OFFER...
IF YOU REALLY WANT HER DEAD... I'LL FIX IT, ARCHIE... I'LL KILL HER... KILL HER! KILL HER!
ZZZ

THE NEXT NIGHT, AFTER SUPPER, I PUT ON MY COAT! I HAD TO SEE MR. BIDDY AGAIN! I HAD TO...
WHERE ARE YOU GOING? I THOUGHT WE SETTLED THIS FOR GOOD LAST NIGHT!
I...I'M GOING OUT, EMILY!

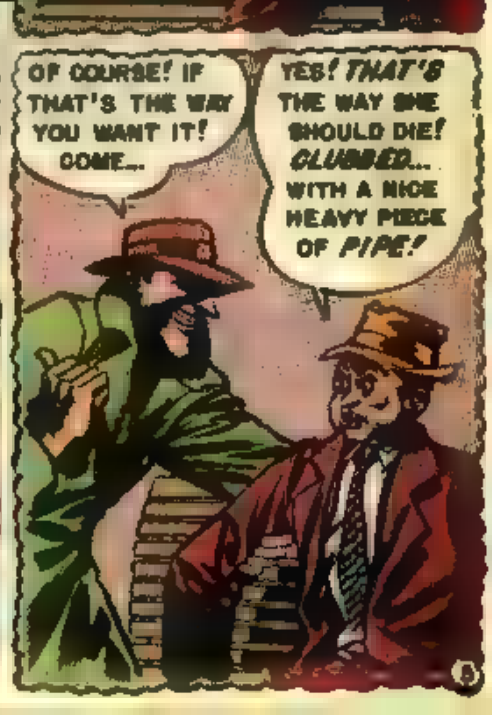
SO HELP ME, ARCHIE CHESTER... IF YOU GO OUT AGAIN TONIGHT AGAINST MY WISHES...YOU'D BETTER NOT COME BACK! NOW...GO TAKE OFF YOUR COAT!
DON'T WAIT UP FOR ME, EMILY!


I SLAMMED THE DOOR ON HER SQUAWKING, RASPING SHRIEKS! I HURRIED ACROSS TO THE PARK! MR. BIDDY WAS THERE, ON THE BENCH UNDER THE LAMP! HE HAD THE CHECKER BOARD ALL SET UP...
EVENING, ARCHIE! I KNEW YOU'D COME! SIT DOWN! THE GAME'S ALL READY! YOU GO FIRST...
I...I ALMOST COULDN'T GET HERE!

I KNOW! SHE'S GETTING PRETTY UNBEARABLE, ISN'T SHE? WELL...ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS SAY THE WORD!
IF...IF I DID, WOULD YOU KILL HER, MR. BIDDY? WOULD YOU, REALLY?

OF COURSE, ARCHIE! THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE FOR! TO HELP YOU FREE YOURSELF!
NOW? HOW WOULD YOU KILL HER?

ANY WAY YOU LIKE! ANY WAY AT ALL!
WOULD YOU... WOULD YOU... CLUB HER? BLUDGEON HER TO DEATH?


OF COURSE! IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU WANT IT! COME...
YES! THAT'S THE WAY SHE SHOULD DIE! CLUBBED... WITH A NICE HEAVY PIECE OF PIPE!

'MR. BIDDY TOOK MY HAND AND LED ME OUT OF THE PARK TOWARD MY HOUSE! ON THE WAY, HE PICKED UP A LENGTH OF LEAD PIPE..'

THIS...THIS IS WHERE I LIVE!

I KNOW! OPEN THE DOOR!

'I OPENED IT! INSIDE, IT WAS DARK AND STILL! WE TIP-TOED IN...'

SHE...SHE MUST HAVE GONE TO SLEEP!

LET'S GO UP TO HER BEDROOM!

'MR. BIDDY WENT FIRST! WE STOLE SILENTLY UP THE STAIRS! THE DOOR TO EMILY'S ROOM WAS OPEN! WE WENT IN..'

ARCHIE? IS THAT YOU?

YES, EMILY!

'I DON'T KNOW WHY MR. BIDDY ANSWERED *FOR* ME! I SUPPOSE HE WAS TAKING NO CHANCES! I WATCHED HORRIFIED AS HE MOVED TOWARD THE BED, THE LEAD PIPE POISED..'

ARCHIE! WHAT...WHAT HAVE YOU GOT IN YOUR...WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO...

I'M GOING TO KILL YOU, EMILY... FOR ARCHIE CHESTER!

'THE HEAVY LENGTH OF PIPE CAME DOWN AGAIN AND AGAIN ON POOR EMILY'S FACE! AT FIRST THE BLOWS SOUNDED SHARP...BUT SOON THE REPEATING SOUNDS BECAME SOFT, DULL, MUSHY THUDS!..'

THAT'S ENOUGH, MR. BIDDY! THAT'S *ENOUGH!*

SHE DESERVES IT... EVERY BLOW...

'I FELT SUDDENLY SICK! I RUSHED TO THE BATHROOM! WHEN I GOT BACK, EMILY LAY IN A BLOOD-SOAKED PILE OF RUMPLED BED LINEN ON THE BED...AND MR. BIDDY WAS ON THE PHONE..'

WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, MR. BIDDY?

WHY, I'M GOING TO PHONE THE POLICE OF COURSE! THEN THEY'LL ARREST ME, AND YOU WILL BE FREE!

ONLY HE LIED TO ME! MR. BIDDY *LIED* TO ME! HE WENT AWAY, AND THE POLICE CAME AND ARRESTED *ME* INSTEAD...

THE FINGERPRINTS ON THE PIPE WERE YOURS! YOU WERE STILL HOLDING IT WHEN WE CAME!

HE GAVE IT TO ME BEFORE HE LEFT! I WAS TOO DUMBFOUNDED TO REALIZE...

WELL, CHESTER! I... I'M SORRY! IT'S A GOOD STORY BUT...

I CALLED FOR THE GUARD TO LET ME OUT! ARCHIE CHESTER'S STORY STILL SOUNDED FANTASTIC TO ME! I HAD CONVINCED THE JURY THAT HE LIED, AND NOW I HAD CONVINCED MYSELF! AS I WALKED DOWN THE LONG LINE OF PRISON CELLS...

MR. BIDDY! YOU'VE COME BACK!

HUH?

I SPRINTED BACK TO ARCHIE'S CELL! HE SAT ON HIS COT SHOUTING AT SOMEONE IN THE DARKNESS OF THE CORNER OF HIS ROOM...

WHY DIDN'T YOU COME BEFORE THIS? WHY DID YOU WAIT SO LONG? YOU SAID YOU'D TAKE THE BLAME! NOW TELL THEM! TELL THEM YOU KILLED EMILY!

I MOTIONED TO THE GUARD! I TOOK HIS FLASHLIGHT AND FLICKED IT ON! THE CHAIR IN THE CORNER OF ARCHIE'S CELL WAS QUITE EMPTY...

GO AHEAD! TELL MR. BRACKMAN! TELL HIM, MR. BIDDY! TELL HIM!

ARCHIE WAS SCREAMING AT A FIGMENT OF HIS IMAGINATION! THERE WAS NOBODY THERE...

SEE HIM? SEE HIM, MR. BRACKMAN? THAT'S MR. BIDDY! I TOLD YOU... I TOLD YOU!

YES! ARCHIE CHESTER ISN'T GOING TO DIE! INSTEAD, I'VE RECOMMENDED THAT HIS SENTENCE BE SET ASIDE, AND THAT HE BE SENT TO THE *STATE HOME FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE!*

HE AND MR. BIDDY OUGHT TO BE VERY HAPPY THERE... TOGETHER!

THE END

Hal Blake bent over the trigger and gave it a final pat. Rigged up this way the gun would go off just as soon as that door was opened from the outside. Hal walked over to the window at the other side of the room and looked out. Bernie was still working over the car . . . the hood was open and he could see his partner puttering around with the motor. It was a perfect set-up! All he had to do was give a whistle in a minute and Bernie would come galloping up here so that they could get started. Bernie would turn the doorknob and BLAM . . . Hal Blake wouldn't have a partner to split the money with, any longer! And the biggest laugh of all was that right now Bernie was busy fixing up the car so that Hal could make a getaway just as soon as Bernie had neatly killed himself by walking into this trap!

It was so simple that Hal had to laugh at himself for not thinking of it sooner. Why should *he* . . . the brains of this partnership . . . have to divide up the money from the bank-job they had pulled a week ago? A smart guy like Hal Blake should be able to walk away with the whole take . . . and leave behind him only a stupid assistant who didn't know how to keep alive!

Hal opened the window and whistled. Bernie stepped back and looked up at him, a smile on his broad face. He waved in answer and said that he'd be right up . . . just as soon as he wiped the grease off his hands.

Hal closed the window and crossed the room, trying hard not to giggle aloud. *The poor boob!* he thought. *He'll be right up . . . in time to rub himself out!*

Hal heard footsteps moving quickly along the hallway and he turned toward the door in expectation. Telling him to get the car ready for our getaway dash, Hal thought to himself, was the best way to be left alone here in the room so that I could fix up this reception! And it served two purposes . . . I not only got him out of the way, but HE was busy working on a getaway for ME!

The knob turned and door swung back on its hinges. For a second Hal could see his big partner standing in the doorway, and then there was a blinding flash and the man began to sink to the floor, a widening sea of red on his shirtfront. Not a groan . . . not a whimper out of him, Hal thought as he stepped over the body and walked along the hallway, patting his wallet to make sure that he had the money from the bank-robbery. Neat as a pin! It sure paid to be *smart!*

Without glancing back Hal Blake stepped into the car that his late partner had checked over for him. He slammed the door shut and put his key into the ignition. His face was wreathed in smiles as his foot pressed against the starter. His smile was short-lived . . . instead of the usual whirr of the motor there was a shattering explosion. The car writhed under the impact and glass showered down upon the dead man wedged behind the wheel.

The trick Bernie considered a smart stunt had worked to perfection. The bomb he had attached to the ignition wires had gotten rid of the partner with whom he didn't want to split the loot!

I WAS ALWAYS THE BUTT FOR PRACTICAL JOKES! IN MY FRATERNITY, I WAS LAUGHINGLY CALLED...

THE GULLIBLE ONE

JACK KAMEN

YES, MY NAME'S HAL ALLENBY! AND THAT WAS JOE KING WHO MADE THE 'SUPERMAN' CRACK.

YOU AREN'T SO FUNNY, JOE!

AW, TAKE IT EASY, HAL! YOU'RE TOO *GULLIBLE!*

I'M *HUNGRY!* WHEN DO WE *EAT?*

THAT'S A GOOD IDEA, JERRY! I'M STARVED, TOO!

FRED PUSHED OPEN A DOOR REVEALING A COMPACT MODERN KITCHEN...

OKAY, BY! YOU AND JERRY ARE ELECTED *CHEFS!* HAL AND JOE'LL *UNPACK* AND I'LL *WATCH!*

GET A LOAD OF THE *FOREMAN!*

AND SO THE WEEK AT FRED VANDERHOFF'S HUNTING LODGE BEGAN! WE WERE HAVING A GREAT TIME, WHEN, ON THE THIRD DAY...

HEY! JERRY...BY...JOE...FRED! LOOK OUTSIDE!

HOLY COW!

IT MUSTA SNOWED LAST NIGHT!

THE SNOW WAS ABOUT THREE FEET DEEP, AND IT WAS STILL COMING DOWN! IT LAY IN HUGE DRIFTS UP AGAINST THE CABIN! A CHILL CREPT INTO EACH OF OUR HEARTS...

WE'LL BE MAROONED HERE!

NO ONE COULD TRAVEL THROUGH *THAT!*

DON'T WORRY, GUYS!

FRED SMILED! HE LED US TO A DOUBLE DOORED CLOSET AND OPENED IT! IT WAS A PANTRY STOCKED TO THE BRIM WITH VARIOUS CANNED GOODS...

SEE! WE'LL JUST DIG INTO THIS FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS TILL THEY COME FOR US

OR WE CAN GO BACK OURSELVES!

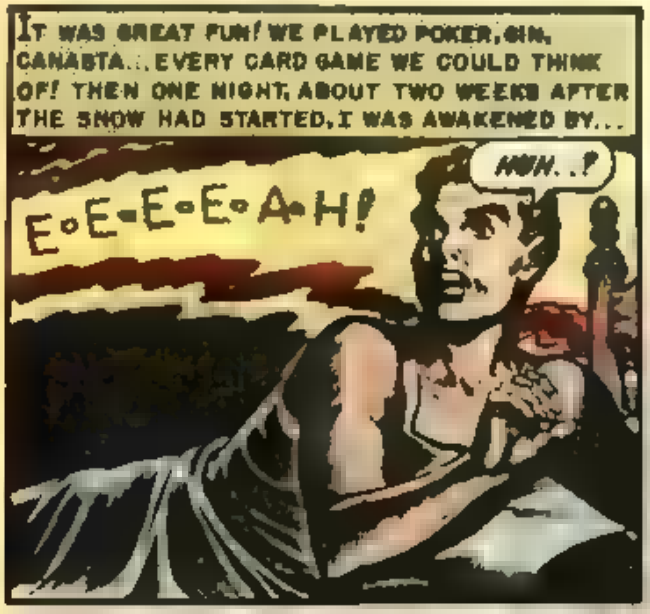
HOT DAMN! AN ENFORCED EXTENDED VACATION!

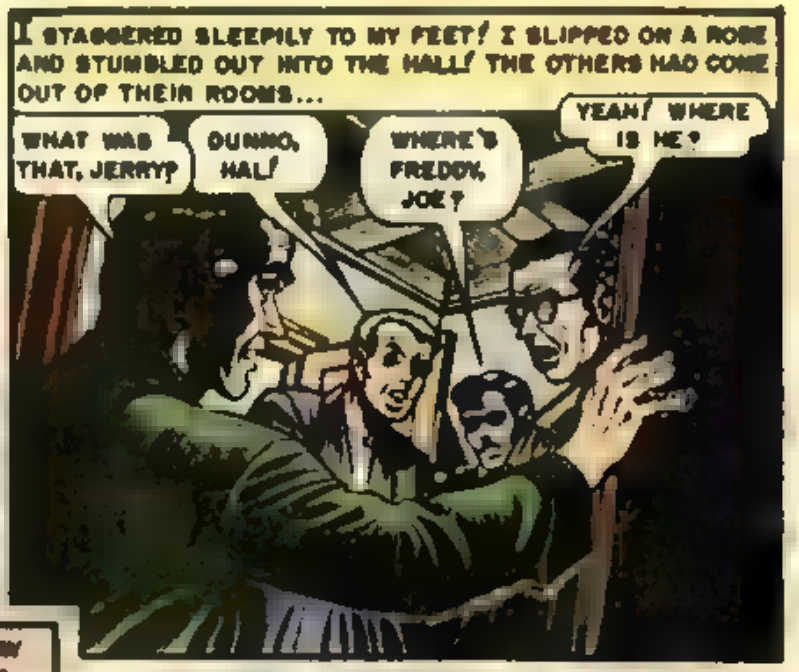
AND SO THE DAYS PASSED! THE SNOW STOPPED, BUT NONE OF US VENTURED FORTH FROM THE CABIN! WHY SHOULD WE! WE WERE HAVING A GRAND TIME BEING MAROONED...

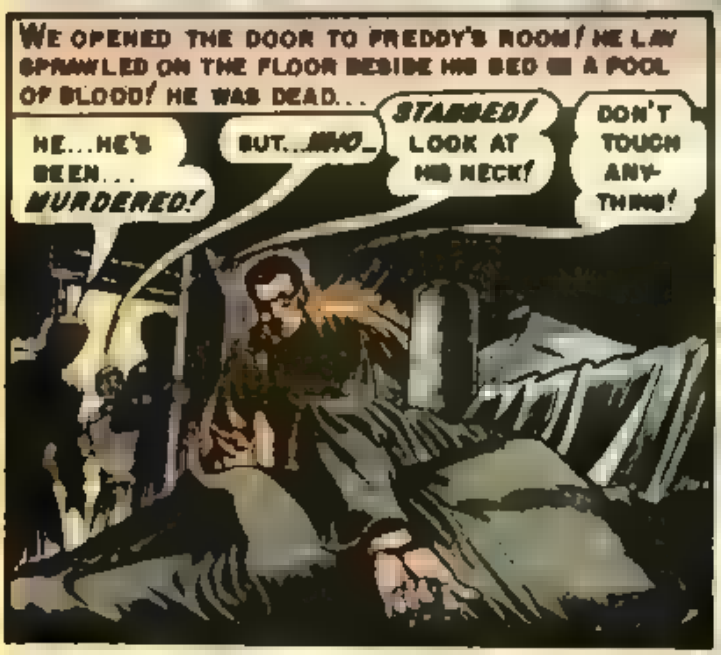
I PASS!

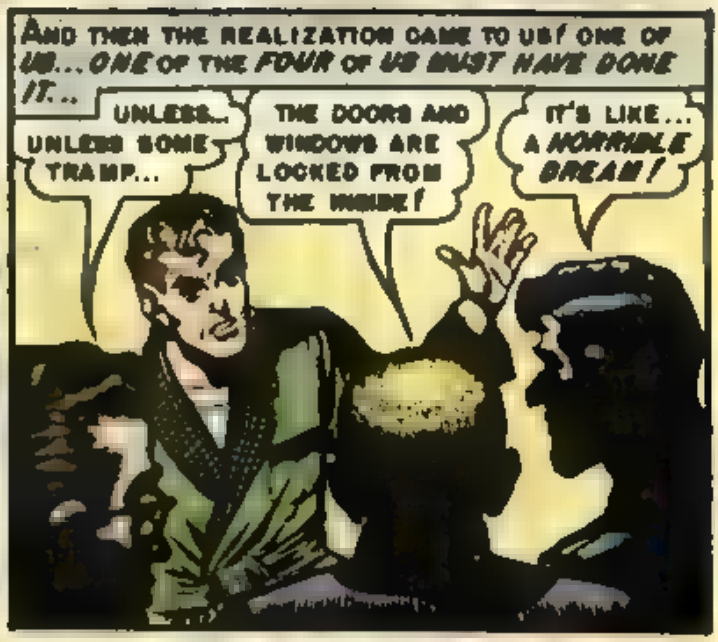
I OPEN FOR A BUCK!

I'M OUT!


IT WAS GREAT FUN! WE PLAYED POKER, GIN, CANASTA... EVERY CARD GAME WE COULD THINK OF! THEN ONE NIGHT, ABOUT TWO WEEKS AFTER THE SNOW HAD STARTED, I WAS AWAKENED BY...
E-E-E-E-A-H!
HUH..?


I STAGGERED SLEEPILY TO MY FEET! I SLIPPED ON A ROBE AND STUMBLED OUT INTO THE HALL! THE OTHERS HAD COME OUT OF THEIR ROOMS...
WHAT WAS THAT, JERRY?
DUNNO, HAL!
WHERE'S FREDDY, JOE?
YEAH! WHERE IS HE?


WE OPENED THE DOOR TO FREDDY'S ROOM! HE LAY SPRAWLED ON THE FLOOR BESIDE HIS BED IN A POOL OF BLOOD! HE WAS DEAD...
HE...HE'S BEEN... MURDERED!
BUT...WHO...
STABBED! LOOK AT HIS NECK!
DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING!


AND THEN THE REALIZATION CAME TO US! ONE OF US... ONE OF THE FOUR OF US MUST HAVE DONE IT...
UNLESS... UNLESS SOME TRAMP...
THE DOORS AND WINDOWS ARE LOCKED FROM THE INSIDE!
IT'S LIKE... A HORRIBLE DREAM!

WE LOOKED AT EACH OTHER INCREDULOUSLY...
ONE OF US WILL HAVE TO GO FOR THE POLICE!
NO! WE'LL ALL HAVE TO GO... TOGETHER!

JERRY WAS RIGHT! THE GUILTY ONE MIGHT GO... GIVING HIM A CHANCE TO ESCAPE! WE ALL HAD TO TRY TO MAKE IT...
WHEW!
KEEP DIGGING!

WE DUG OURSELVES OUT THE CABIN! IT TOOK US OVER TWO HOURS! THEN, JOE DISCOVERED...
HEY! THE SNOW'S GOT A CRUST! WE CAN WALK ON IT!
GOOD! THAT'LL MAKE IT A LOT EASIER!

WE WERE ALL READY TO DROP FROM EXHAUSTION WHEN WE FINALLY GOT TO THE POLICE STATION IN THE NEARBY TOWN...

WHAT? *MURDERED!* *WHO?*

FRED VANDERHOFF!

WE TOLD THE POLICE THE WHOLE STORY! MR. VANDERHOFF ARRIVED TO CLAIM THE BODY! HE WAS ALL BROKEN UP...

ONE OF YOU DID THIS! ONE OF YOU *KILLED MY SON!* AND *ONE* OF YOU IS GOING TO *PAY!*

THEY KEPT US THERE FOR THREE WEEKS! THEY QUESTIONED US... DAY AFTER DAY....

ALL RIGHT, ALLENBY! IF YOU DIDN'T DO IT...WHO DID?

I DON'T *KNOW!*

I HAD AN IDEA... BUT... WELL, THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE! EVENTUALLY, THEY HAD TO LET US GO...

OKAY, YOU GUYS! WE'RE LETTIN' YOU GO ON 'HABEAS CORPUS'! *WE KNOW* ONE OF YOU DID THIS! *YOU KNOW* ONE OF YOU DID IT! S'HELP ME, IF YOU'RE *PROTECTING* THE *GUILTY* ONE... WELL... AW, GET THE ✱@!✱ OUTTA HERE!

ONE YEAR WENT BY! FREDDY'S MURDER WAS STILL UNSOLVED! *JERRY... BY... JOE... ONE* OF THEM DID IT! BUT, *WHO?* THEN, TWO NIGHTS AGO, I RECEIVED A LETTER...

IT'S AN INVITATION! OLD MAN VANDERHOFF'S GIVING A MEMORIAL DINNER FOR FRED! WANTS *ME* THERE...

I WENT RELUCTANTLY! AS I ENTERED THE VANDERHOFF MANSION, A SHUDDER RAN THROUGH ME! I WAS USHERED INTO THE LIVING ROOM...

THERE'S HAL!

AH! EVERYONE IS HERE! NOW WE CAN BEGIN!

JERRY WAS THERE! BY, TOO! AND JOE! THE FOUR OF US... THE FOUR THAT HAD BEEN PRESENT WHEN FRED WAS... MURDERED! MR. VANDERHOFF LED US INTO THE DINING ROOM, WHERE AN EXQUISITE TABLE WAS SET...

YOU MAY SERVE NOW, JEEVES!

VEDDY GOOD, SIR!

EC

WE SEATED OURSELVES ABOUT THE TABLE! THERE WAS HARDLY A WORD SPOKEN THROUGHOUT THE DINNER! I LOOKED AT JOE! I HAD ALWAYS SUSPECTED JOE...
AND NOW GENTLEMEN! IF YOU ARE ALL THROUGH, WE CAN RETIRE TO THE LIBRARY FOR COFFEE!
WE FOLLOWED OLD MAN VANDERHOFF INTO THE LIBRARY! I WHISPERED TO JERRY...
WHAT'S HE UP TO? WHAT'S THE DEAL?
SEARCH ME, HAL!
WE SAT AROUND THE COFFEE TABLE BUT NO COFFEE WAS POURED! INSTEAD, JEEVES ENTERED WITH A GLASS OF BLUISH-GREEN LIQUID! HE PLACED IT ON THE TABLE...
GENTLEMEN! I KNOW YOU ARE WONDERING WHY I SENT FOR YOU... WHY I HAVE GATHERED THIS MORBID GROUP TOGETHER! IF YOU WILL ALL FIX YOUR EYES ON THIS GLASS OF LIQUID I'LL TELL YOU!
I KNOW WHICH ONE OF YOU KILLED MY SON FRED!
WHAT?
YES! I'VE KNOWN FOR SOMETIME TONIGHT... I POISONED THE GUILTY ONE'S FOOD!
I LOOKED AROUND! WAS THE OLD MAN MAD? THE OTHERS WERE STARING WIDE-EYED AT EACH OTHER, TOO...
..THIS GLASS CONTAINS THE ANTIDOTE FOR THE POISON! THE GUILTY ONE MERELY HAS TO DRINK IT DOWN, AND HIS LIFE WILL BE SPARED!
I LOOKED AT JOE... JOE, WHOM I HAD ALWAYS FELT DID IT! I COULD NEVER PROVE IT THOUGH! HE WAS STARING AT OLD MAN VANDERHOFF..

I LOOKED AT THE OLD MAN! HE WAS STARING AT *ME!* DID HE THINK *I* DID IT?

I TURNED BACK TO JOE! *HE* WAS LOOKING AT *ME*, NOW, FOLLOWING THE OLD MAN'S GLANCE! THE OTHERS... THEY WERE LOOKING AT ME, *TOO*

I LOOKED BACK AT OLD MAN VANDERHOFF! HE STARED AT ME... HIS MOUTH TWISTED IN A FAINT SMILE! I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, '*GOOD LORD!*' THE OLD MAN SUSPECTS *ME!* HE... HE'S POISONED *MY* FOOD!'

I LOOKED AT JOE! HIS BROW WAS WET WITH PERSPIRATION! HE WAS STARING AT THE GLASS, NOW! YES... *JOE* DID IT... I WAS *SURE!* BUT THE OLD MAN... HE SUSPECTED *ME*... HE HAD POISONED *MY MEAL!* I JUMPED UP... GRABBED THE GLASS OF GREENISH LIQUID AND GULPED IT DOWN...

NO

IT BURNED! IT TASTED LIKE HOT FIRE! I DOUBLED UP AND FELL TO THE FLOOR! MR. VANDERHOFF STOOD OVER ME...

THANK YOU, MR. ALLENBY! THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONFESSION!

WHAT... WHAT'S HAPPENING TO HIM?

GENTLEMEN! I MUST ADMIT I'VE TRICKED YOU! I HAD *NO IDEA* WHO THE MURDERER WAS! AFTER ALMOST A YEAR HAD PASSED, I HIT UPON THIS SCHEME! NO ONE'S *FOOD* WAS *POISONED!* THE '*ANTIDOTE*' WAS *POISON!* MR. ALLENBY, BY DRINKING IT DOWN, CONFESSED HIS GUILT!

NO... COUGH... I...

THINGS ARE HAZY, NOW! I'M DYING, I KNOW! AND VANDERHOFF THINKS HE HAS AVENGED HIS SON'S MURDER! I CAN'T TALK! EVERYTIME I TRY, I COUGH BLOOD! I CAN HARDLY MAKE OUT ANYTHING NOW! BUT JOE'S HERE... STANDING OVER ME... SMILING! WHAT... WHAT'S THAT HE'S SAYING?

POOR HAL! HE ALWAYS WAS... *GULLIBLE!*

THE END

THE HAUNT OF FEAR

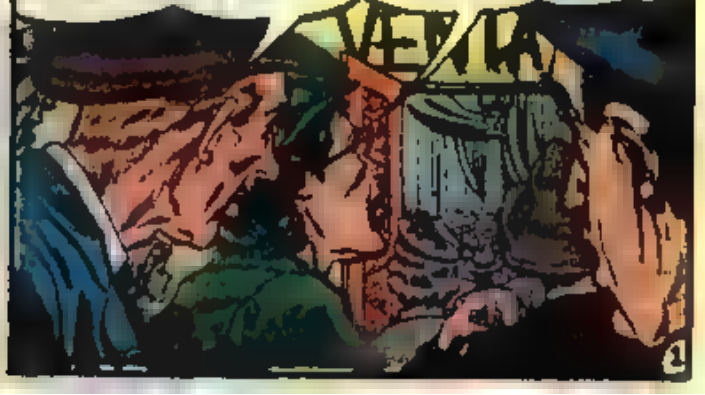
HEE, HEE! YEP! IT'S ME AGAIN! *THE OLD WITCH*, MISTRESS OF THE *HAUNT OF FEAR!* COME IN! COME RIGHT IN! THE FIRE UNDER MY CAULDRON IS LEAPING AND CRACKLING! THE EVIL BREW WITHIN IS BUBBLING AND GURGLING! I'M READY TO DISH OUT ANOTHER *TASTY TALE* OF *TERROR! HUNGRY? GOOD!* THEN CUDDLE UP CLOSE TOGETHER SO YOUR BONES WILL RATTLE AGAINST ONE ANOTHERS' WHEN YOU START TO SHIVER FROM THIS CHILLING STORY I CALL...

PARTIALLY DISSOLVED!

THE NOISE OF THE CROWD UNDER THE THEATER MARQUEE ROSE TO A BABBLING CRESCENDO AS THE DOORS WERE FLUNG OPEN! PEOPLE PUSHED AND SHOVED, TRYING TO SQUEEZE THROUGH THE NARROW OPENINGS! FROM THE BOX OFFICE, A LINE OF NEOPHYTE STRETCHING CUSTOMERS EXTENDED DOWN THE BLOCK AND AROUND THE CORNER! THEY HAD ALL COME TO SEE *VENTAR, THE GREAT*. . .

THEY SAY HE'S AS *GOOD* A MAGICIAN AS *HOUDINI* OR *THURSTON* WAS...

YES! HIS ILLUSIONS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE *INCREDIBLE!*



CAPACITY WITH THE EXPECTANT THRONG! EVERY SEAT WAS OCCUPIED! AS THE LIGHTS DIMMED, A HUSH FELL OVER THE AUDIENCE...

SH-H-H! THE PERFORMANCE IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!

THEY SAY THEY'RE TURNING PEOPLE AWAY, OUTSIDE!

THEN... A PUFF OF SMOKE EXPLODED ON THE HUGE STAGE, AND *THE GREAT VENTAR* APPEARED...

BRAVO! SUPERB! HEAR, HEAR!

GOOD EVENING, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

VENTAR BOWED, MAJESTICALLY BATHED IN A BRILLIANT YELLOW SPOTLIGHT! HE WAS DRESSED IN WHITE TIE AND TAILS! ON HIS HEAD HE WORE A BEJEWELED TURBAN! SOON THE OVATION QUIETED, AND HE SPOKE ...

FOR MY *FIRST* OFFERING, I WILL PERFORM THE WELL-KNOWN *'SAWING-A-MAN-IN-HALF'* ILLUSION! ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MY *ASSISTANT... MOLTO...*

MOLTO STEPPED FORWARD! HE WAS A SMALL MAN WITH BEADY EYES! A LARGE BOX WAS UNVEILED BY TWO SCANTILY CLAD GIRLS...

AND NOW, MOLTO... IF YOU WILL GET IN THE BOX ...

MOLTO CLIMBED INTO THE ELONGATED BOX, WHICH WAS FIRST SHOWN TO BE EMPTY! HIS HEAD AND FEET EXTENDED FROM EITHER END.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! IF THERE BE ANY AMONG YOU WHO HAVE WEAK HEARTS OR TIMID STOMACHS, MAY I SUGGEST THAT YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES...

VENTAR'S PATTER WAS INSIDIOUS! HE ALWAYS MANAGED TO AGITATE THE AUDIENCE INTO A STATE OF FEAR AND ANXIETY! HE TOOK THE SAW AND BEGAN TO CUT THE BOX IN TWO...

...A FEW MORE INCHES AND I WILL REACH MOLTO'S BODY...

THE AUDIENCE WAS DEATHLY STILL! THE ONLY AUDIBLE SOUND WAS THE STEADY RIP-RIP OF THE SAW! SUDDENLY...

AAAAAAAH!

MOLTO'S SCREAM ECHOED THROUGH THE THEATER! MEN GRIMACED! WOMEN WHIMPERED! VENTAR CONTINUED TO SAW UNTIL HE HAD CUT ENTIRELY THROUGH THE BOX! HE MOVED THE TWO ENDS APART...DRAPING THEM FIRST...

THIS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IS MY ILLUSION!

THERE WAS SOME SCATTERED APPLAUSE! VENTAR LAUGHED! THE TRICK HAD BEEN SO CONVINCING, THE AUDIENCE WAS HORRIFIED...

OH! I SEE YOU ARE NOT CONVINCED! REMEMBER, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN... I *SAID* THIS WAS AN *ILLUSION*...

HE CLAPPED TWICE! THE TWO SCANTILY-CLAD GIRLS PUSHED THE HALVES OF THE BOX TOGETHER AGAIN! VENTAR REMOVED THE DRAPE...OPENED THE BOX...AND...

MY ASSISTANT, MOLTO! ALL IN ONE PIECE!

THE APPLAUSE WAS DEAFENING! IT LASTED FOR TWO MINUTES! YES, VENTAR WAS PRETTY TERRIFIC! THE REST OF THE SHOW WAS JUST AS AMAZING! HE MADE MOLTO DISAPPEAR, THEN REAPPEAR AGAIN! HE HAD A GUILLOTINE THAT APPARENTLY CHOPPED MOLTO'S HEAD OFF! THERE WERE MANY OTHER ILLUSIONS EQUALLY INCONCEIVABLE! WHEN IT WAS OVER...

GO BACK, VENTAR... THEY'RE STILL APPLAUDING!

NO, MOLTO! I HAVE SOMETHING FAR MORE IMPORTANT...IN MY DRESSING ROOM! COME...

VENTAR LED MOLTO TO HIS DRESSING ROOM! HE OPENED A SMALL CHEST AND DREW FORTH A LENGTH OF CHAIN AND A LOCK...

WHAT *IS* IT, VENTAR?

IT ARRIVED JUST BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE! THIS WILL BE MY GREATEST FEAT...MY *GREATEST*...

VENTAR FILLED A BASIN WITH WATER! THEN HE DROPPED THE CHAIN AND THE LOCK INTO IT! A MINUTE PASSED...THEN...

WHY... THE *MIDDLE LINK OF THE CHAIN*...IT'S *DISSOLVING*!

AND THE *LOCK*... MOLTO! *LOOK AT THE LOCK!*

IT WAS TRUE! THE HASP OF THE LOCK... THE PART THAT OPENS AND CLOSES...HAD ALSO DISSOLVED...

I'VE HAD A *METALLURGIST* WORKING ON THIS *FORMULA* FOR *TWO YEARS!* IT'S COST ME *SIX THOUSAND DOLLARS!* BUT IT WILL BE WORTH IT!

DO YOU REALIZE WHAT THIS CAN *MEAN*, MOLTO? A *METAL* THAT *DISSOLVES IN WATER!* THINK OF THE FABULOUS *ESCAPE-ACTS* I CAN *PERFORM!*

THIS METAL, VENTAR! WHAT *IS* IT?

IT'S AN *ALLOY* OF *STEEL, ALUMINUM,* AND *CALCIUM!* WHEN IT IS IMMERSED IN WATER, THE *CALCIUM DISSOLVES* AND THE METAL DISINTEGRATES!

HERE...IS THE *FORMULA! MOLTO!* I GIVE IT TO *YOU!* YOU HAVE BEEN MY ASSISTANT FOR SEVEN YEARS, NOW! YOU KNOW *ALL* MY *SECRETS!* THEREFORE IT IS ONLY RIGHT THAT YOU *KNOW THIS ONE!*

THANK YOU, VENTAR!

NOW, HERE IS MY PLAN! NEXT WEEK WE GO TO CLEVELAND, OHIO! WE HAVE HIRED A SMALL *THEATER* THERE! I AM GOING TO *CANCEL* THAT! I AM GOING TO HIRE THE *CLEVELAND STADIUM!*

BUT...THAT IS AN *ENORMOUS PLACE*, VENTAR! HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO *FILL* IT?

BY THE *GREATEST PUBLICITY STUNT* EVER STAGED, MOLTO! I WILL BE PLACED INTO A *LOCKED CHEST!* THE CHEST WILL BE WRAPPED IN *CHAINS!* THIS CHEST WILL BE PLACED IN A SECOND CHEST, ALSO SECURELY *LOCKED* AND *CHAINED!* THE WHOLE THING WILL THEN BE THROWN INTO *LAKE ERIE*...

AND... YOU WILL BE ABLE TO *ESCAPE?*

OF COURSE! THE *LOCKS* AND APPROPRIATE *LINKS* OF THE *CHAINS* WILL BE MADE OF THIS NEW SECRET *ALLOY!* AS SOON AS THE CHESTS SINK INTO THE WATERS OF LAKE ERIE, THE LINKS AND LOCK ON THE OUTSIDE CHEST WILL *DISSOLVE!* THE LID WILL *SPRING OPEN!* THE WATER WILL RUSH IN AND THE SAME THING WILL HAPPEN TO THE *INSIDE CHEST*...AND *I* SHALL COME TO THE *SURFACE*...

IT WILL BE *FANTASTIC*, VENTAR! PEOPLE WILL MOST *CERTAINLY* COME TO SEE YOU AFTER *THAT!*

THE NEXT WEEK, THE NEWSPAPERS IN CLEVELAND, OHIO... ON THE SHORE OF LAKE ERIE... ANNOUNCED THE STARTLING NEWS...

THE CLEVELAND PRESS'

DARING MAGICIAN TO PERFORM AMAZING ESCAPE FEAT FROM CHAINED AND LOCKED DOUBLE CHESTS DROPPED INTO LAKE ERIE!

PUBLICITY STUNT PRECEEDING PERFORMANCE AT THE STADIUM!

EVENING NEWS

VENTAR, THE GREAT, TO ESCAPE FROM CHAINED AND LOCKED CHESTS SUBMERGED IN LAKE. PUBLIC INVITED!

MEANWHILE, VENTAR ORDERED MOLTO TO PREPARE THE EQUIPMENT...

PLACE A 'CALCIUM' LINK EVERY EIGHTEEN INCHES, MOLTO! WE MUST TAKE NO CHANCES!

YES, VENTAR!

AND SO THE FATEFUL DAY ARRIVED! FORTY THOUSAND PEOPLE LINED THE SHORE OF LAKE ERIE TO WITNESS THE AMAZING FEAT! THOUSANDS MORE IN EVERY TYPE OF WATER CRAFT AVAILABLE JAMMED THE LAKE AROUND THE BARGE VENTAR HAD HIRED...

IT IS TIME, VENTAR!

IS EVERYTHING READY, MOLTO?

YES! EVERYTHING IS READY!

LOUDSPEAKERS BLASTED A DESCRIPTION OF WHAT WAS GOING ON TO THOSE WHO COULD NOT SEE TOO WELL! TELEVISION CAMERAS CARRIED THE EVENTS TO HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS IN THEIR HOMES! NEWSREEL CAMERAS HUMMED...

VENTAR IS GETTING INTO THE CHEST! IT IS BEING EXAMINED BY THE MAYOR...

THE LOCK HAS BEEN SNAPPED SHUT! THAT, TOO, IS NOW BEING EXAMINED...

GOOD ENOUGH!

NOW, THE CHAINS!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! THEY ARE NOW WRAPPING THE CHEST WITH CHAINS! THE CHAINS HAVE ALSO BEEN EXAMINED!

NOW LIFT THE CHEST INTO THE SECOND CHEST!

STAND ASIDE!

THE SECOND CHEST HAS BEEN EXAMINED! THEY'VE LOCKED IT! THE CHEST IS BEING CHAINED! THEY'VE NOW SIGNALED VENTAR THAT THEY ARE GOING TO DUMP HIM INTO THE LAKE...

THERE HE GOES!

THE CHESTS HAVE SUNK TO THE BOTTOM, A DEPTH OF OVER FORTY FEET! THE SECONDS ARE TICKING OFF...

HOW LONG SHOULD IT TAKE, MOLTO?

ABOUT THREE MINUTES, YOUR HONOR!

THE LOUDSPEAKERS CONTINUED TO BLARE! ONE MINUTE DRAGGED BY! THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN BOATS AND ALONG THE SHORE WERE HUSHED! TWO MINUTES WENT BY! THEN THREE...

HE SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN *OUT* BY NOW!

GET THE *GRAPPLING HOOKS* READY!

FOUR MINUTES PASSED...FIVE MINUTES...

SOMETHING'S WRONG!

CLEAR THE AREA! WE'VE GOT TO TRY TO GET HIM UP!

CONFUSION REIGNED! THE POLICE BOAT TRIED TO DRAG THE LAKE BOTTOM...WITH NO SUCCESS! THE HUNDREDS OF SMALL BOATS THAT HAD COME TO WITNESS THE FEAT ONLY SERVED TO HAMPER ITS ATTEMPTS! AFTER AN HOUR...

IT'S NO USE! THE CHESTS HAVE PROBABLY SUNK INTO THE MUD BY NOW...

THEY NEVER DID RECOVER VENTAR'S BODY! FOR DAYS THEY DRAGGED THE LAKE BOTTOM AND THEN GAVE UP! IN HIS HOTEL ROOM...ALONE... MOLTO LAUGHED...

TOO BAD, VENTAR! TOO BAD! NOW ONLY *I* REMAIN WITH THE SECRETS OF YOUR AMAZING ILLUSIONS!

AND SO...AS TIME PASSED...*MOLTO, THE GREAT*, BECAME FAMOUS! THRONGS PACKED THEATRES TO WITNESS *HIS* WONDERFUL FEATS OF MAGIC...

THEY SAY HE'S AS GOOD AS HOUDINI OR THURSTON...OR EVEN *VENTAR*...

HE WAS ONCE VENTAR'S ASSISTANT, YOU KNOW!

AND AFTER TWO YEARS, MOLTO RETURNED TRIUMPHANTLY TO CLEVELAND...

THE THEATER IS A SELL-OUT, MOLTO! YOU ARE WISE NOT TO TRY TO FILL CLEVELAND STADIUM AS VENTAR DID!

MOLTO'S PERFORMANCE IN CLEVELAND WAS A ROUSING SUCCESS! VENTAR'S ILLUSIONS HAD ALWAYS BEEN AMAZING! AFTER IT WAS OVER, A MORBID CURIOSITY DREW MOLTO DOWN TO THE SHORE OF LAKE ERIE! IT WAS DARK AND LONELY! HE STOOD LOOKING OUT OVER THE WATER! SUDDENLY HE BEGAN TO LAUGH! HIS LAUGHTER DRIFTED OVER THE BLACK RIPPLES...

HAH, HAH! *TOO BAD*, VENTAR! TOO BAD FOR YOU I LOCKED THE *OUTSIDE* CHEST WITH A *REAL* LOCK! A LOCK THAT WOULDN'T *DISSOLVE!*

THE WATERS OF LAKE ERIE SHIMMERED IN THE DARKNESS! MOLTO'S LAUGHTER [illegible] OVER THE SURFACE...

NOW, *I'M* THE *STAR*, VENTAR! NOT *YOU!* FOR *SEVEN YEARS* I'D BEEN YOUR *SERVANT*... YOUR *SLAVE!* I SAW MY OPPORTUNITY, AND *TOOK* IT! AND NOW YOU'RE *THERE*...*ROTTING* IN THE *LAKE ERIE MUD!* AND I'M... *FAMOUS!*

SUDDENLY, MOLTO STOPPED TALKING! OUT IN THE WATER, A PATCH OF FOAM APPEARED! A HEAD AND SHOULDERS ROSE FROM THE BLACK SURFACE! A FIGURE MOVED TOWARD THE SHORE SLOWLY... STEADILY...

WHO...WHO'S THAT OUT THERE? SOMEONE...SWIMMING?

THE FIGURE KEPT COMING! MOLTO STRAINED HIS EYES TO SEE THROUGH THE DARKNESS! IT CAME OUT OF THE WATER, IT'S BLOATED ROTTED FLESH HANGING LOOSELY FROM WHITENED BONES.

VENTAR! NO...NO...

MOLTO TURNED TO RUN! HE WENT SPRAWLING ON THE WET SAND! THE DECAYED, FOUL-SMELLING CORPSE BENT AND LIFTED HIM IN A VICE-LIKE GRIP...

LET ME GO... LET ME *GO!*

SLOWLY IT TURNED AND STARTED BACK INTO THE BLACK WATER! MOLTO SCREAMED AND SHRIEKED, STRUGGLING TO FREE HIMSELF... BUT THE LONG-DEAD, PULPY, HALF-EATEN CORPSE HELD HIM FAST! OUT INTO THE LAKE IT STUMBLED DOWN...DOWN...

AND SOON, MOLTO'S HYSTERICAL CRIES WERE STIFLED BY THE GURGLING OF WATER RUSHING INTO HIS LUNGS.

HEE, HEE! YEP! MOLTO TOOK HIS LAST SWIM THAT NIGHT! WITH HIS CLOTHES ON, TOO! WHAT? YOU WANT TO KNOW *HOW* VENTAR FINALLY ESCAPED FROM THE CHESTS TO AVENGE HIS MURDER? WELL, HOW SHOULD I KNOW? AM *I* A *MAGICIAN?* OH, BY THE WAY! LOOK FOR ME IN V.K.'S BOOK, '*THE VAULT OF HORROR*' ON YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTANDS! MORE CHILLS AWAIT YOU!